



Ukrainian Drama
TRANSLATIONS

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Author	OLHA MACIUPA
Play	FRAGMENTS AND PUZZLES
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Translator	JOHN FREEDMAN AND NATALIA BRATUS
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Copyright of original text belongs to	olga.maciupa@gmail.com
Copyright of translation belongs to	jfreed16@gmail.com https://www.facebook.com/profile.php?id=100001152842057

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Music, the 1990s

MOTHER: Turn off that stupid music.

DAUGHTER: "Take me quick / take me all over the sea. / And kiss me everywhere / I'm now an adult, you see."

MOTHER: I can't listen to that Moscow stuff. You listen to that pop music all day long.

DAUGHTER: Why should I listen to your Ivo Bobul? About how lindens bloom? Or those official concerts full of folk songs.

MOTHER: We bought you all kinds of cassettes. Excellent Ukrainian music.

DAUGHTER: Everyone's listening to it now. It's popular.

MOTHER: Well, you're going to have to listen to it when I'm not home.

NARRATOR SPEAKS A PERFORMANCE TEXT: I took out my cassette of Ruki Vverkh, a popular Russian band whose songs romanticized the relationship between minor girls and adult men. I understand that now. I turned off my cassette player and went to mop the floor. It was a Saturday. My family didn't like me listening to Russian music. Dad always switched to another radio station. It surprised me, then it infuriated me, and for awhile, as an adult, I was ashamed to admit it to anyone. Who cared what was from Moscow or the Soviet Union? Ukraine was independent now. What had they done to us? It had been a long time. My grandmother and father said they did a lot of bad things. They lost their homes due to deportations, although they rarely

mentioned it at the family table. They didn't say much about it. In 2018, I was the first in our family to visit the villages from which my great-grandparents had been deported. But we never had enough time to talk about it properly – either about their eviction or my trip. Now I myself have blocked my three-year-old son's access to cartoons in Russian, because if you don't, YouTube's algorithms will make only Russian videos come up. This is a strange text, it's a non-text, non-theatrical. There's no space for theater here, there is no distinction between tones and halftones. There is only evil and good, and, on top of that, a bunch of emotional triggers. One night during martial law I ordered a DNA test - suddenly, quickly, abruptly, unplanned, without consulting, preparing, or thinking, so that if there were a nuclear explosion and there would be an end from which no one escaped - I would at least know my roots. Is that infantile? Between washing the bed for refugees, preparing food for my guests, buying fabric for first-aid kits, and doing translations - I sent out for this test in Chios. I haven't listened to music at all during the war. None. Except for "Oh, Red Viburnum in the Meadow" and Jamala's song about the deportation of Crimean Tatars in 1944. To these two songs, our skaters, who escaped from bombs flying over Kharkiv, performed their routine in Montpellier at the International Figure Skating Championships. If I could perform a small drawing for you, here would be the picture - you can change the name in the captions of Edgar Degas' painting from "The Russian Dancers" to "The Ukrainian Dancers," which has already happened at the National Gallery in London. The music of Tchaikovsky or Mussorgsky can be replaced by Lyatoshynsky or Stankevich, and I need to investigate in more detail the family history that I have never heard from the older generation. You can just read this, I believe in the performability of language and the power of text.

A Supposed Opposition Drama Festival for which there were High Hopes in the 2000s.

A hostel in the Russian capital.

ZHENYA: So what did you want to say with your play?

OLYA: Sorry, but it's a bit of a critique of Russian imperialism and Russia's colonial position on Ukraine. Are you familiar with postcolonial theory?

ZHANYA: No, what is it? I am a veterinarian. I do operations on animals, I mostly castrate cats.

OLYA: Well, for example, have you ever noticed the socialist-realist painting in the Kyiv station of the Moscow metro? The one celebrating the anniversary of the Pereyaslav Council?

ZHENYA: It's quite beautiful. What Council?

OLYA: The Pereyaslav Council. The agreement was signed in 1654. When Hetman Khmelnytsky swore allegiance to the Russian tsar.

ZHENYA: I don't know the story well. Is there something wrong with it?

OLYA: Basically, everything's wrong with it. See how the Russians are depicted? And then the Ukrainians? The Russians are dressed as city dwellers, in jackets and suits, emphasizing their culture and superiority, while the Ukrainians are in folk costumes, bearing bread, salt, and lard. You'd think, no big deal, but those happy-go-lucky village simpletons, unlike the Russians, are never going to go to space. This is a forced image of people greeting their "older brother." Eva Thompson wrote very well about this. Actually, many have.

ZHENYA: Well, America treats us the same way. They say we have nothing but grandmothers.

OLYA: What does America have to do with it? That's a false comparison. Why is no one writing about the war? Why does no one criticize the actions of their own society? I thought people here would be showing some reflection on this topic. That you all would be asking hard questions of your president. But you only write about your infantilism and your generational crisis.

ZHENYA: Listen, your Russian is rather odd, you have a kind of Baltic accent.

OLYA: I'm from Western Ukraine and have never spoken Russian, although I have heard it and understood it and read it since childhood

ZHENYA: Right, you're closer to Poland, Poland is right nearby there.

Sitting nearby is a guy from Tyumen who takes advantage of the pause and asks:

ALEXEI: Oh, you have that band Ocean Elsa there. I really love them! Say a few words in Ukrainian.

OLYA: Sly *kishka*, kitty-cat, go to bed.

ALEXEI: Oh, that's cool, they have a song like that. So “kishka” means “cat”?

ZHENYA: Olya lives in Poland, let's learn a few words in Polish. So, is “cat” “cat” in Polish?

Someone calls the guy from Tyumen and he leaves.

ZHENYA: I think he's a fag.

OLYA: What makes you say that?

ZHENYA: He wears a scarf and listens to weird music.

NARRATOR SPEAKS A PERFORMANCE TEXT: There was also this girl Lena, who was really fun and she loved hitchhiking like I do. We even started planning a trip to Europe, but at one point she said that Crimea has always been Russian. What? Oh fuck. There was another playwright who spoke about how he was inspired by Maidan and Ukrainians, and how he would like to be Ukrainian. But nowadays he writes that children are dying not only in the Mariupol Theater, but also in Angola and all over Africa. Because every day children die somewhere. And this is the reality of life, we must live on. Zhenya wrote in 2022 under her tricolor avatar that she is Russian and is not ashamed of it. The guy from the Urals isn't on Facebook, so I don't know what songs he's listening to lately. I remember walking around Moscow seeing a billboard with a little boy in a military uniform, seeing war games and teenagers getting dressed in costumes on Red Square to Rammstein music, matryoshka dolls with portraits of some Tsar, Lenin and Putin. At the time I laughed and thought what nonsense. Then, in December 2021, an acquaintance from Moscow wrote that she came across a 2022 calendar in a kiosk with a portrait of Stalin, and when she asked the saleswoman, “What is that?” the woman answered, “So what? People like it.”

If you can create a performance, I suggest burning a matryoshka doll with a portrait of Putin, or a picture of a matryoshka doll with a portrait of Putin on it. It's no coincidence that militarization and symbols reflecting it were showing up in public spaces in Russian cities. So a performance might involve burning Putin's empty matryoshka doll. It must be empty inside, you need to make sure of that first. It's easy to read this. And to imagine the fire. I believe in the power of text.

Crimea, Alushta, the 2000s

NARRATOR SPEAKS A PERFORMANCE TEXT: That's when I learned I was a follower of Bandera. Everybody everywhere called us that. Four of us girls had gone to Crimea after entering the master's program. On vacation! As soon as we started talking, we heard the accusations: “Western Ukrainians! Banderites!” It was unpleasant. One day on the terrace overlooking the sea, the girls and I were eating watermelon. Next to us there was a woman we couldn't keep our eyes off of. She always talked loudly, joked with the Georgians selling fruit nearby, and was very colorful and interesting. You notice people like this immediately. In the evenings she sang at a nearby bar. Loud music on hot Crimean evenings is a special attribute of the southern Ukrainian peninsula. We were happy to be so lucky, because she really had a beautiful voice, one that was really nice to listen to, unlike at most discos, where they usually play cheap crap. On this afternoon, this singer was with us on the terrace, and hearing our conversation, she asked aggressively:

AGGRESSIVE NIGHT CLUB SINGER: What language is that you're squawking in? Polish? Are you from some backwoods village?

MARICHKA: We're speaking Ukrainian.

AGGRESSIVE NIGHT CLUB SINGER: That's no language. Just empty squawking. How horrible your language is. Half-baked Westeners. There is only Russia and the Russian language. Russia will be everywhere.

NARRATOR SPEAKS A PERFORMANCE TEXT: She was very aggressive and she scared us enough that we just ignored her comments. That evening she beat up some girl – the scandal rippled through the resort, everyone whispered about it. She did it, of course, not because of a language, but because of some wrinkle in her soul. Damaged for life, what can you do about it? That evening, the woman, whose name we never learned, went out to sing in the bar and, among other songs, she rather unexpectedly launched into "Don't look for the Red Route in the evening, you're my only one – there's only you, believe me." I think every Ukrainian knows it well, literally everyone knows the chorus. It's one of the pearls of Ukrainian pop. Apparently a customer had paid her to sing it. That was followed by many Russian romances and pop songs. It was very weird and painful. I could talk endlessly about the Ukrainophobic adventures we had in Crimea that summer. This part of the performance provides for a map of the Crimean peninsula that will be painted in blue and yellow over and over again. And then once again. It can be done on a screen, or it might be possible to distribute paints and brushes to the participants of the performance, and each of them will paint this map as the final representative of international law. It can just be read. I believe in the power of text.

A Train Bound for Ivano-Frankivsk, 1990s.

There were many women. All were local. One was breastfeeding a baby. It was very natural. They talked about the city, who had gone to Italy. What was going to happen in some Mexican soap opera. There was talk about school.

1st WOMAN: Did you hear that Russian will not be taught at school anymore?

2nd WOMAN: It hasn't been taught here for a long time.

3rd WOMAN: What do you mean? How can that be?

2nd WOMAN: Girls, what do you need with Russian? You need to learn English.

1st WOMAN: Where will I study it? How? I so loved reading Pushkin. How can there be no Russian? How can it be that we studied Russian all our lives and now nobody will teach Russian?

NARRATOR SPEAKS A PERFORMANCE TEXT: I never studied Russian, but I understand it, I can read and speak it, although, truthfully, as I was told, with a Baltic accent. We traveled a long time by train, when I was a child all trains were a long adventure for me. Spruce trees, spruce forests, trees, trees, trees. I'm probably a forest creature. Just before the war in February, I attended a play opening in Severodonetsk. From Lviv there was a long train, number 046 D, that ran all day. It stopped every half hour. Rubizhne, Kreminne, Kabanne, Svatovo, Kupyansk, Shevchenkove, Chuguiv, Kharkiv, Lyubotyn, Bohodukhiv, Kyrykivka, Smorodyne, Sumy, Bolopillya, Vorozhba, Putivl, Konotop, Bakhmach, Nizhyn, Darnytsia, Kyiv, Sviatoshyn, Malyn, Korosten, Yablunets, Novohrad-Volynskiy, Radulin, Shepetivka, Slavuta, Kryvyn, Ostroh, Zdolbuniv, Dubno, Radyvyliv, Brody, and finally arrived in Lviv. None of these cities is safe. My journey was calm but disturbing. I thought about the land, beyond the window were fields, fields, trees, trees, and forests. There used to be a Soviet children's atlas. In place of the eastern segment of Europe there were pictures of St.

Basil's Cathedral in Moscow, the Colosseum in Rome, Big Ben in London, and the Eiffel Tower in Paris. And then there was, at best, emptiness, where Ukraine, Poland and the Baltic countries were located, maybe trees or wild animals. In Google I found similar pictures of atlases - only not Soviet, but European. In addition to the spruce trees in Ukraine and other countries of the former socialist camp, there were animals running about, plants growing, or just bare colored earth. So in this performance the participants shall receive a map of the world - quite beautiful and colorful. And each participant will be able to cut out the countries and move them to wherever they want. It will be a game. It might even be therapeutic. Personally, I would swap Russia and Australia. And push it down closer to the South Pole. It's just a performance, just a game that might surprise you. This all can just be read. I believe in the power of text.

NARRATOR SPEAKS A PERFORMANCE TEXT: This is a strange text, a non-text, non-theatrical. I have no need of theater, there is no distinction between tones and halftones. There is only evil and good, and, additionally, a bunch of emotional triggers. The war came to me in Poland. I have lived here for the last 10 years. I did not hear the sirens, I did not hide in a bomb shelter. I am haunted by guilt. I have read that this is the survivor's complex. I don't sleep, I don't eat, I sleep whether night or day, adrenaline overtakes me as I worry about relatives near Kharkiv and in Kyiv. Everyone is alive for the time being. I buy tourniquets and look for military fabrics such as cordura and ripstop. People spend the night in my rented apartment, women with children and animals. One day two Svitlanas spent the night with me. The name Svitlana means "light." One of them was a tailor, although most recently she had worked in a bakery in Volodymyr-Volynskyyi. Before the war, the other had worked in the Kharkiv Dolphinarium. She knew a lot of interesting things about snakes and fish. Before the war she sold snakes to Russia. Her apartment was bombed. But she still has the keys to her apartment in her possession.

SVITLANA THE AQUARIUM WORKER: I feel sorry for the belugas, how are they doing? I think we will soon drive them out of here then head for the Kremlin and bomb Moscow.

SVITLANA THE SEAMSTRESS: What are you saying? Why should we go there? Just make them get out and go.

SVITLANA THE AQUARIUM WORKER: Just let them go? I am vindictive. I can't just forgive this.

SVITLANA THE SEAMSTRESS: Would you send your son there to die?

SVITLANA THE AQUARIUM WORKER: Yes, I would. I want vengeance. His unborn children, my unborn grandchildren, will hate them, you know? I told my Russian relatives, who are no longer relatives - first take on that shithead of yours, why did you come to us? I am vindictive. I cursed them. We must destroy Russia. But my grandfather went through the whole war, we have all his medals hanging here. He fought against the Nazis. I have spoken Russian all my life. I loved my belugas and snakes. I am vindictive.

SVITLANA THE SEAMSTRESS: But why bomb them? We are not like that. I myself studied in Rostov-on-Don, I have many acquaintances there, I studied with the Chechens. I, too, will never forgive Russia, never, but just let them go.

ROMAN: Calm down, girls, don't quarrel.

SVITLANA THE AQUARIUM WORKER: We're just talking. Everything's okay.

SVITLANA THE SEAMSTRESS: Nobody's quarreling. Everything is fine.

NARRATOR SPEAKS A PERFORMANCE TEXT: I imagine a performance.

On stage there is a scenographic panel of the Kyiv metro station in Moscow, where people in national dress accompany their city-slicker Russian guests to a ship and send them out onto the Dnieper River, setting them on fire, as Princess Olga of Kyiv once did, accepting pigeons from her enemies as a tribute – a bird from each hut – and tying a burning branch to each pigeon so that when, after dark, she let the birds free – each of them flew home under their own roof. As such, the whole city burned down. My dream